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E.O. 12958: DECL: 2020/02/12
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SUBJECT: CDA Encourages Vietnam to Step Up Participation in GPOI Exercises

REF: 09 HANOI 883; 10 HANOI 200

CLASSIFIED BY: Harry Kamian, Political Counselor, State, Hanoi;
REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: MFA DG for IO Affairs Le Hoai Trung told Charge February 12 that after reviewing its tenure as a UNSC member, Vietnam was likely to be more active in multilateral fora addressing global issues such as counter-terrorism, piracy, non-proliferation, and climate change. Charge encouraged Vietnam to attend the GPOI exercise in Cambodia in June/July 2010 as a participant (vice observer). Trung reiterated that Vietnam could not join peacekeeping operations until after the Prime Minister approved a "comprehensive strategy" (being drafted by the MFA) covering all aspects of participation. In addition, the "public relations campaign" that must necessarily precede deployment could not begin until after the Communist Party Congress in January 2011. Ref. B provides an update on Vietnam's plans for participation in the President's Nuclear Security Summit. End summary.

¶2. (C) Charge opened her February 12 meeting with MFA IO DG Le Hoai Trung, responsible inter alia for Vietnam's UN activities, nuclear affairs and human rights, by congratulating Vietnam for completing its term on the UN Security Council. Trung thanked the U.S. for "strong cooperation" in New York and Hanoi. Trung said a recently completed interagency review of Vietnam's Security Council experience would recommend to the Prime Minister that Vietnam increase its engagement in multilateral fora on global issues such as non-proliferation, counter-terrorism, piracy, and climate change. Trung believes Vietnam's positive UNSC experience would propel leaders to expand the GVN's current position from promoting "international economic integration" to greater engagement on non-economic issues ("international engagement"). Trung pointed to Communist Party Chairman Nong Duc Manh's recent use of the new term in his Review of 2009 as a strong signal of that increasing engagement, but said an official policy change would have to be approved at the CPV Party Congress in January 2011.

¶3. (C) Trung expressed a willingness to use the report to the Prime Minister on new international engagement to obtain the PM's approval for Vietnamese participation in international peacekeeping operations (PKO). It is not clear whether a change in legislation would be required for actual deployment (as Trung had previously told us - ref. A). While the constitution does not prohibit troop deployments for PKO operations, it does not permit them either; it also defines the military's role as "defending the nation." Trung offered his personal view that in the long run, this ambiguity could be clarified by a "decree issued by the Standing Committee of the National Assembly explaining that the constitution allows

troops to be deployed abroad for PKO operations." In any event, "a public relations campaign" to prepare the Vietnamese public "with lingering memories of the (American) war" to accept the possibility that Vietnamese soldiers could die abroad was absolutely essential and could not be started in the politically charged atmosphere leading up to the Party Congress.

14. (C) The Charge urged Vietnam, in the meantime, to increase its participation from observer to participant in GPOI exercises, including Exercise Angkor Sentinel in Cambodia in June/July 2010. The Charge noted that Secretary Gates had raised the issue with Defense Minister Thanh during their December meeting in Washington. The U.S. had raised GPOI during the Bilateral Defense Dialogue and Political-Military talks, and that we run the risk of repeating the same talking points for a third year in a row if Vietnam does not increase its level of engagement. The Charge also said the USG was willing to provide the GVN additional technical assistance to help Vietnam prepare for increased participation in PKO-related activities, as well as share information about other countries' experience in growing their PKO capabilities. Trung expressed appreciation for the offer. He was non-committal on GVN participation in the GPOI exercise in Cambodia, but promised to raise the matter with the Ministry of National Defense. He also recommended Charge engage the MND again; the CDA noted the Ambassador has invited the Defense Minister to dinner to discuss mil-mil engagement opportunities following the latter's visit to the U.S., including peacekeeping.

Palmer